

DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING

**Fiscal Year 2005 and Fiscal Year 2006
Spending and Performance**



**Testimony of Michelle Pourciau
Acting Director
District Department of Transportation**

**Anthony A. Williams
Mayor**

**Committee on Public Works and the Environment
Carol Schwartz, Chairperson**

**Wednesday, February 22, 2006
1:30 PM
Room 412**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Schwartz, Councilmembers and staff. I am Michelle Pourciau, Acting Director of the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) and I am extremely pleased to be here today to present DDOT's testimony for this Oversight Hearing on Fiscal Year 2005 Spending and Program Implementation.

I am delighted to review the exciting work of the Department with you during my second week as Acting Director. Throughout my twenty years with District Government and former roles as Deputy Director and Chief of Transportation & Public Policy, I have touched almost every aspect of DDOT's work. Therefore, I am especially proud to continue Director Tangherlini's strides in developing the Department.

I look forward to achieving even more during my tenure and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Chairperson Schwartz and members of the Council for your support and actions to help DDOT fulfill its mission. I look forward to furthering our working relationship as we continually improve our services.

I will discuss DDOT's operations, new initiatives and the awards DDOT has received, concluding with a survey DDOT commissioned in 2004 and 2005 to measure public attitudes about our activities.

Basic Operations and Maintenance

DDOT's mission is to enhance the quality of life for District residents and visitors by ensuring that people, goods, and information move efficiently and safely, with minimal adverse impacts on residents and the environment. In fulfilling its mission, DDOT oversees 1,100 miles of roads; 65,000 streetlights; 114,000 city trees; 1,580 traffic signals as well as responsibility for the District's bicycle and pedestrian facilities, traffic and pedestrian safety and managing the District's public space.

Streets and Alleys

In 2005, DDOT initiated a District-wide alley and local street restoration program. Based on our survey of alley and roadway conditions, we developed a list of the streets and alleys that will be restored in 2005 and beyond. They are listed by ward on our website. To minimize street disruptions, the schedules are coordinated with the D.C. Water and Sewer Authority's schedule of lead water pipe replacement and work generally does not proceed without utility clearance.

In 2005, approximately 920 blocks were repaved and 132 blocks were completely reconstructed. In FY-06 to date, 205 blocks have been paved.

A July ribbon-cutting ceremony with Councilmember Marion Barry Jr. and Director Tangherlini marked the completion of the rehabilitation and beautification of Elvans Road, SE. The reconstructed road, in a designated Hot Spot area of concentrated city services, boasts new pavement, sidewalks, curbs and gutters and handicap access ramps as well as updated lighting and state-of-the-art water drainage. The community turned out for the event as DDOT fulfilled a long-standing commitment to the community.

Other street projects include:

- The repaving of North Capitol Street from Michigan Avenue to Harewood Rd,
- The resurfacing of Kenilworth Avenue and East Capitol Street, and
- The reconstruction of Nebraska Avenue, from 41st Street to Tenley Circle is in the final stage of completion.

Bridges

Last year was a milestone for the District's bridges. The federal

government and the Williams Administration, with the support of the City Council, made substantial new multi-year, financial commitments to this key part of the District's transportation infrastructure.

Through the efforts of Congresswomen Eleanor Holmes Norton and with your assistance, Chairperson Schwartz, both the South Capitol Street/Frederick Douglass and the 11th Street Bridges were major beneficiaries of the federal funds distributed in the transportation reauthorization bill, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA-LU). Of the total of \$143 million specifically allocated for District bridge and infrastructure needs, \$123 million is committed to the rehabilitation of the South Capitol Street Bridge and \$17.6 million for upgrade of the 11th Street Bridge ramps as part of the East Washington Project. This will relieve congestion on Sousa Bridge and Pennsylvania Avenue, SE, and divert through-traffic from local streets on both sides of the Anacostia River.

The East Washington Project is estimated to cost \$300 million over five years. With the support of the Williams Administration and the Council, most of the additional funds needed for this project will come from half of the proceeds of the off-street parking tax. This tax is charged to vehicles that park primarily downtown.

It's important to note that we are on schedule with a host of Anacostia projects which will lead to major improvements and accessibly redressing the imbalances caused by the expressway projects of the 1950s and 60s.

While the District and the Federal Governments made these long-term commitments, DDOT continued to upgrade other vital bridges throughout the city. Last year, the following bridge projects were completed or substantially finished:

- Anacostia Freeway over Naval Research Laboratory Road,
- North Capitol Street over Irving Street,
- East Capitol Street over Anacostia River,
- the 16th Street Underpass at Scott Circle, and
- D & E Streets over the Center Legs of I-395.

We also received an additional \$6 million in the Federal Highway 2005 year-end redistribution of funds, the highest amount for similar sized jurisdictions. These funds are being used to provide immediate repairs to the Theodore Roosevelt Bridge.

The DDOT bridge inventory includes 214 highway bridges and 15 pedestrian bridges. In order to better manage these assets, DDOT developed the Tunnel Management System [TMS]. The TMS is the first-in-the-nation comprehensive inventory of a jurisdiction's tunnel assets, including structural, electrical and mechanical components allowing for a reliable and optimized maintenance and rehabilitation schedule.

Streetlights

Last year, DDOT made substantial progress towards reducing the backlog of the obsolete and inferior streetlights. The problem-plagued series circuits were replaced in:

- Mount Pleasant,
- Spring Valley,
- Woodley Park, and
- along 3rd Street, SW
- Mt. Olivet Rd., NE
- Constitution Avenue, NW
- M Street, NE
- Pierce Street, NE

Basic streetlight maintenance has been a long-standing challenge for DDOT. To meet this need for consistent, reliable upkeep for all of the District's streetlights, DDOT is planning to award a multi-year asset management contract. This performance-based agreement will include incentives and penalties for the contractor to meet a high level of performance. It is also comprehensive, in that it covers not only streetlights, but also alley lights, overhead sign lights, bridge navigation lights and the electrical operations that control the openings for the present Woodrow Wilson and South Capitol Street Bridges.

Trees

DDOT's Urban Forestry Administration achieved several milestones, pruning 18,278 trees, planting 4,030 new trees and removing approximately 2,200 dead or hazardous trees. The District maintained its Tree City USA designation and intensified outreach for community plantings and technical advice through relationships with the Casey Tree Foundation, DC GreenWorks and Greenspace for DC.

Traffic Signals

Traffic optimization is one of DDOT's most important responsibilities – sitting in traffic is one of the most frustrating aspects of modern life. To minimize traffic snarls and gridlock, DDOT continued the retiming of the District's signalized intersections with expanded timing plans more finely tuned to ever-changing traffic conditions. DDOT has more than doubled the number of traffic light timing plans from for the District's 629 signalized intersections. These reflect the variations in traffic conditions depending on time of day, day of week, season and so forth. Wards 3-8 were retimed last year; Wards 1 and 2 were retimed in 2004.

DDOT is now developing a ward-based network for traffic signal timing optimization in coordination with neighboring jurisdictions.

DDOT has also initiated a speed zone study for all interstates, freeways, arterial and collector streets to determine whether the current speed limits are appropriate. The first phase is scheduled for completion next month and DDOT will prepare the necessary rulemaking to change speed limits where deemed appropriate.

Signal timing is a key part of the city's planning for event and emergency evacuation. DDOT further enhanced its ability to switch to 240-second cycle length operation at all intersections on evacuation routes.

Safety

Safety is always a top DDOT priority, for pedestrians, motorists, bicyclists and for DDOT staff. Pedestrians are special safety target and DDOT is pursuing an integrated safety program aimed at this group. The program includes a newly-hired pedestrian safety specialist who is aggressively pursuing the three Es of traffic safety: education, engineering and enforcement.

To reduce traffic and pedestrian accidents at forty dangerous intersections, DDOT has adopted the Highway Safety Improvement Project. Seventeen of these locations have been made safer with new turn lanes, pavement markings, lane control signs, signal timing changes and a host of design changes, all part of DDOT's long-term commitment to increased safety.

School safety is also a special concern. DDOT is using the five-year, \$5 million federal Safe Routes to School award to address safety for students who walk and bike to school. These funds will be used to build new sidewalks, curbs and ramps, improve and add crosswalks, install traffic-calming measures and increase safety education and police enforcement.

As part of this program, DDOT will conduct an intensive pilot program to promote safer walking and cycling at schools in each Ward.

DDOT also conducts extensive education and enforcement campaigns in cooperation with the Metropolitan Police Department and other agencies.

Traffic crashes that result in pedestrian deaths are the subject of intensive DDOT activity. Each crash site is subject to thorough examination of road conditions and the accident report to determine what short- and long-term measures are available to increase safety at each location.

Just this month, DDOT convened a meeting to solicit input from federal experts and private organizations and individuals on all aspects of DDOT's pedestrian safety program. The meeting was designed to help DDOT further extend its already well-developed and nationally recognized program and a number of fruitful ideas were brought up.

In 2005, DDOT installed almost 1,300 countdown pedestrian signals across the city and has a project underway to install pedestrian signals at the remaining intersections. In addition, DDOT placed almost 100 pedestrian pylons at various intersections throughout the City to help drivers recognize pedestrian crossings.

New Initiatives

Over the past year, DDOT has undertaken a number of new initiatives that will bring major benefits over the near- and long-term. These include the Great Streets program, rescuing DDOT's historical records, contracting with Local, Small and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises, alternative transportation, emergency planning a new bus shelter contract, and protecting the environment.

Great Streets

As Mayor Williams announced in the State of the District Speech, the Great Streets program will leverage public investment in infrastructure to catalyze private investments. This will improve key District neighborhoods, including access to services and opportunities and enhanced safety and environmental health.

Financed by the revenue from the recently signed bus shelter contract and based on the streetscape improvements recently completed for Barracks Row on 8th Street, SE., Great Streets includes six corridors covering over 22 miles. These streets are:

- H Street, NE/Benning Road,
- Nannie Helen Burroughs Avenue, NE/Pennsylvania Avenue, SE,
- Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE
- South Capitol Street,
- Minnesota Avenue, NE/SE, and
- Georgia Avenue/7th Street, NW.

DDOT's Historical Records

DDOT has many items of historical interest, including: drawings, notebooks, maps, engineering plans, photographs and artifacts scattered in storage throughout the city. They are not inventoried or properly maintained and preserved.

DDOT plans to work with historic preservation experts to make all of these materials more accessible to DDOT staff, DC Government and the public. Of particular interest are the materials that were stored in the abutment of the Sousa Bridge, including thousands of photos of past construction projects slowly being damaged by exposure to dampness and water. These photos are being professionally stabilized and preserved and DDOT intends to make them all available on the internet.

DDOT will further enhance this documented history with oral histories that are gathered from current and former transportation workers to capture information not otherwise recorded.

Local, Small and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises

DDOT has greatly expanded its commitment to using Local, Small and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (LSBDE). As in past years, DDOT has continued to exceed our LSDBE goal year-after-year. For FY 05, the goal was beat by nearly 35% and for the first quarter of FY 06, 100% of DDOT's small purchases were with SBE certified contractors.

DDOT has also enhanced the certification and administration of LSDBE contracting with an on-line, fully automated Certification and Compliance Tracking System which other agencies are now emulating.

Alternative Transportation

DDOT has started several exciting alternative transportation programs.

The Circulator

The Circulator was successfully launched on two routes in June, 2005. The east-west route joining Union Station and Georgetown, and the north-south route between the Convention Center and the Southwest Waterfront.

The Circulator has enjoyed continued growth in ridership since inception. The Georgetown-Union Station route carried just under 100,000 passengers during January while the Convention Center-SW Waterfront bus transported over 25,000. This represents a significant increase of over 27,000 passengers over the past six months.

Carsharing

Following the model of other jurisdictions, DDOT launched the District's carsharing program to conveniently locate easy-to-lease cars throughout the city. Designed to reduce congestion, air pollution and demand for parking by reducing overall car ownership, the program has designated almost 90 public spaces in all parts of the city.

Streetcar

DDOT is moving steadily towards implementing the District's first streetcar system since 1962. We are excitedly laying the groundwork for the Anacostia line to be launched next spring. This will run from the metro station to Bowling Air Force Base. In response to strong community desires, tracks will be laid for a possible future streetcar along H Street/Benning Road as part of Great Streets improvements.

Emergency Planning

On July 4th, DDOT successfully tested the District's emergency traffic signal timing for selected emergency/evacuation routes in Operation Fast Forward. For this major event, there was generally easier pedestrian and motorist travel from the National Mall after the Independence Day fireworks. DDOT organized and coordinated this effort with surrounding jurisdictions including the Virginia Department of Transportation, Maryland Department of Transportation, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Metropolitan Police Department, Emergency Management Agency, the US Capitol and US Park Police. This first-in-the-nation test was featured in the national news.

DDOT is following-up Operation Fast-Forward with the development of a "walkout plan." This regional simulation plan will direct pedestrians who have to evacuate an area without vehicles or mass transit.

Bus Shelter Contract

Mayor Williams signed a new citywide bus shelter contract with Clear Channel Adshel which has agreed to build close to 800 new shelters within two years in the city's neighborhoods and to pay the District more than \$150 million over the next 20 years. These funds have been earmarked for the Great Streets program to improve streetscapes along several of the District's key corridors.

Environment

DDOT takes seriously its commitment to improving the quality of the environment. In fact, DDOT is a leader in a number of local and regional initiatives including the creation of the Interstate Air Quality Council. The Council was established on May 31, 2005 by a memorandum of understanding signed by the Governor of Maryland, the Governor of Virginia, and the Mayor of DC. The Council works with the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and helps streamline planning to meet new federal standards for ozone and fine particulates. The Council consists of six members: the District of Columbia Directors of Transportation and Environmental Health and the State of Maryland and Commonwealth of Virginia Secretaries of the Environment and Transportation.

Snow

Snow removal and the entire winter weather program has continued to improve, reaching a new level of satisfaction after the most recent storm, Saturday-Sunday, February 11-12. In addition to continued improvements in training and equipment, DDOT and our snow partner, the Department of Public Works, have a new strategy. The strategy calls for pre-treating the major roads before an event, so the snow melts as soon as it hits the pavement starting the removal immediately. This improves performance, reduces accidents, increases customer satisfaction and saves money.

In this most recent storm, about 200 heavy and light plows and salt trucks were deployed through the city before, during and after the storm. Roving crews continued to monitor streets and treat icy patches Monday and Tuesday evening after the storm.

I want to take the liberty of quoting several positive emails:

From Northwest: “I wanted to let you know how pleased [we] were with the city's snow response....A city snow plow came by our small street removing snow and salting the road no less than four times. This is a marked improvement over past years' performances. We are grateful and wanted to let you know. Please pass our thanks to the responsible city employees.”

And from a resident in Southeast: “Well, kudos to DDOT! Even the side street on which I live was plowed, three times! Granted they were just doing their job, but a big thank you is in order. Thanks”

Awards

DDOT continues to receive recognition for its work in various areas. A few examples of the local, regional, national and international awards received last year for the Anacostia Architectural Design Standards include: EPA Green Highway Initiative Award, the American Society of Landscape Architects Maryland/Potomac Chapter Honor Award and the Jury Award from the Washington chapter of the American Planning Association.

The Georgetown Project received a NCAC APA Chapter Award for Outstanding Work in Implementation and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), recognized DDOT with a Best Practices in Smart Growth and Transportation for the South Capitol Gateway project. This award singles out DDOT for the smart growth

features planned for South Capitol Street as the southern grand entrance to the US Capitol, realizing a key feature of the L'Enfant Plan.

DDOT's geographic information systems (GIS) team won a Special Achievement Award from the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), the largest research and development organization dedicated to GIS.

DDOT employees once again took advantage of the 85th Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board held here in Washington last month. This is one of the most important meetings for transportation professionals, drawing over 10,000 attendees from the public, private and academic sectors from all over the globe.

DDOT employees presented technical papers, chaired and attended committee meetings and showcased DDOT services in the exhibition hall. Hundreds of transportation and bicycle maps were distributed along with a fact sheet on DDOT's research efforts and the DDOT annual report.

Public Perception of DDOT

I would like to conclude with a description of two public perception surveys DDOT commissioned in 2004 and 2005 to obtain quantitative information on how District residents perceive the condition of their transportation system and the quality of DDOT services. These surveys collected information in several areas, including:

- * Perceptions of DDOT's core service delivery;
- * The importance of various transportation issues;
- * Mode share data for commute and non-commute trips;
- * Priority rankings for major transportation investments

*** Opinions of transportation options facing the department, such as parking and mass transit.**

Here is a sample of the results, (2004 compared to 2005):

- Snow clearing, 42% positive to 60%,**
- Streetlights, 50% positive to 65%,**
- Trees, 51% positive then to 58%,**
- Road conditions, 16% positive to 27%, and**
- Overall performance, 38% positive to 58% positive.**

All of DDOT is quite proud of these results. However, we will never lose sight that there is much work to be done and DDOT personnel will always look for ways to improve all of our activities.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to present you with a summary of DDOT's accomplishments over the past year. DDOT has made much progress in enhancing the District's transportation services, and we look forward to continuing this trend in the future with your support.

I am pleased to answer any questions.